

From Cradle to Grave

in his tipi, for menstrual blood nullifies all power. If she had no tipi 841
of her own, she moved in with her parents ("the medicine of old
people was too weak to be harmed"). When an article in her tent was
needed by someone, it was set or pitched out the door, and no one
entered against the occupant's will. During the time, she ate no meat;
it would make her sick at the stomach and cause her to flow more.
She could not wash her face because that would make her get wrinkled
before her time; nor could she touch or comb her hair because it
would cause her to get gray young. At the end of her period she had
to bathe in a running creek, no matter how cold, even if it was
frozen over, before she could go back to her husband's tipi. No man
could eat from the same dish or drink from the same cup as she
until this had been done. An unmarried girl had to observe approxi-
mately the same restrictions. After menopause all female tabus were
removed; the woman was now physiologically equal to man.

All societies recognize at least three age groupings, child, adult, 561 ●
and old person. The Comanches, for their part, recognized five age
groups:

<i>ona</i> :—a baby	<i>ona</i> :—a baby
<i>tuinap'</i> —a boy up to adolescence	<i>tuep3t</i> —a girl up to adolescence
<i>tuiβitsi</i> —a young, unmarried brave	<i>naiβi</i> —an adolescent girl
<i>tenap'</i> —a grown man; also <i>muwɔ</i> : (a substitute term used by some people who had to observe the tabu on the use of the name of a dead rela- tive when <i>tenap'</i> had been used as a personal name.	<i>h3βi</i> —a grown woman
<i>tsukup'</i> —an old man; also, <i>naraβə</i> , a joking term of familiarity.	<i>pu'st3</i> —an old woman

The physical difference between child and adult is easily recog-
nizable, and the passage from childhood to maturity is marked by
physiological events which make it possible to date it, exactly for

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561 girls and less definitely for boys. However, the physical passage from childhood to maturity does not necessarily coincide with the social transfer of the individual from one status to the other. Although the actual transition was made more quickly in Comanche society than in our own, where both men and woman remain legally children until long after they are physically mature, clear-cut lines of division between the various groupings were lacking. Age classes were lacking. In the change from boyhood to manhood, for instance, the real test was whether the boy was able to follow the strenuous life of a warrior.

888 The tendency for societies to emphasize the individual's first change in age status and largely ignore the change from adult to old age is due in part to the difficulty of determining the onset of old age. But in certain societies the change from the adult to the old status is made more difficult for the individual by the fact that the patterns for the new status require a different personality. This was true in Comanche society. Although society provided for old people fairly well and treated them with respect, there is abundant evidence that the transition was a difficult one for most individuals. "A brave man," said the Comanches, "dies young."

Women were able to make the change with less difficulty than men, and the line was more clearly discernible. During and before the menopause there were a number of social tabus or restrictions. They could not remain in the same room with a medicine man. Afterwards they were released from restrictions pertaining to the supernatural, and henceforth could handle sacred objects, obtain power through dreams, and practice as shamans.²⁴

887 In the case of men, the ascribed status for old age differed radically from that for adults. The adult male was a warrior, vigorous, self-reliant, and aggressive. He took what he could get and held what he had without much regard for the abstract rights of those weaker than himself. A ready willingness to arbitrate differences or to ignore slights was a sign of weakness resulting in loss of prestige. The old man, on the other hand, was expected to be wise and gentle, willing to overlook slights, and, if need be, to endure abuse. It was his task to work for the welfare of the tribe, giving sound advice, smoothing down quarrels, and even preventing his tribe from making new

²⁴ Informant: Medicine Woman; see also Linton, *The Study of Man*, 119.

191 found among the 2400 or so Comanche, and
there is a complete inversion as one descends through the generations as to which is other and which mother tongue. Most old people over 60 speak little or no English, while most young people under 30 speak little or no Comanche. Grandchild and grandparent, as among immigrant groups in this country, often have real difficulty in communicating and the breach between generations who know different ways of life is thereby widened. Although most Comanche between the ages of 30 and 60 are bilingual, the number who are equally fluent in both English and Comanche is relatively small. They are mainly men and a few women between the ages of 40 and 55; the generation that stands midway between the old culture and the new. A few Comanche descendants of Mexican captives speak Spanish in addition to English and Comanche.

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The degree of fluency in English of any individual Comanche provides what is probably a fairly reliable index of his relative acculturation to American culture patterns. This is perhaps best measured, not by some formalized test of his knowledge of English, but rather by observing his choice of language and his command of it in various speech situations ranging from the intimacy of a family or other primary group, on the one hand, to casual associations in religious, economic or administrative contexts on the other.¹²⁰ Or the problem might be reversed and the Comanche spoken by younger individuals in various social contexts could be observed. Such observations when correlated with variables of personality and status would be of con-

(113) ¹²⁰ See Felix Gross, *Language and Value Changes among the Arapaho*, IJAL 17.10-17 (1951); George Barker, *Social Functions of Language in a Mexican-American Community*, Acta Americana 5.185-202 (1947); and especially Uriel Weinreich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems* (New York, 1953); Einar Haugen's definitive two volume study, *The Norwegian Language in America* (Philadelphia, 1953).

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natural patron or guardian spirit endowed the petitioner with a certain amount of power and various songs and procedures needed by the recipient to manipulate his Medicine. There was not much transfer of Medicine from individual to individual. Medicine men worked generally in a benevolent manner and received a small fee for their services. There was also a lively ghost fear and a poorly developed notion of the afterlife. 174

These people were without war patterns before the advent of the horse. They were raided continually by their more warlike neighbors, but they did not develop an institutionalized form of resistance.

Each local group operated in a specific hunting territory, but there were no notions of land ownership and trespassing was not punished. Their dwellings were crude, temporary brush constructions for the most part. Material possessions were also limited in complexity and amount by the rigors of the environment and the difficulties of transportation. Though the dog was present, it was not used for transportation. A family's possessions were usually carried by the women during the march. Women occupied an inferior position in the society, though they were respected for their full share in the food quest.

A Basin-Type Culture

A Basin-type culture, such as has been briefly described and which could be represented by the historic Wind River Shoshone, was the basic stock from which the Comanche sprang after acquisition of the horse and their subsequent movement onto the Plains. It is probable that these Basin people, living on the western fringes of the Plains, made periodic pedestrian hunting expeditions onto the Plains after buffalo or that they were made aware of the desirable qualities of the buffalo from contact with groups which more thoroughly exploited this beast. Shimkin (Trenholm and Cole 1964:17) suggests that the Shoshone may have roamed the Plains area many generations before finally being driven back into the shelter of the Rockies. Therefore, the Comanche advent can be seen as the appearance on the Plains of a mounted Shoshonean people. The Comanche, with the horse and therefore the ability to efficiently exploit the buffalo herds and the Plains environment, built upon culture patterns already sufficient for this type of life style—exaggerating some, modifying some, deleting others, and developing still others.

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With these Plains nomads the laurels went to the young and the physically able, while the older people, valued for their wisdom in Shoshone society, faced an old age of declining social prestige and humiliation. And, though the Comanche lacked a pervasive political organization, the war chief, no longer the Medicine man, became the individual who could wield the most power over the most people at any one time. His authority, however, was temporary and transitory. An elderly

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With regard to Sanapia's niece's child, Sanapia said that she knew who had witched the girl but did not tell the mother for fear of frightening her. Sanapia does not suggest that any supernatural talents are involved in the ability to identify the witch. Since Sanapia believes that witchcraft can only be operated by those with a high degree of *puba*, the field of possibilities is immediately narrowed. She evaluates the community in which the witch's victim lives and, through a process of elimination, selects the witch. She does not make her choice known for fear of frightening the victim or his parents, as has been mentioned, and also because she feels that if her accusations are made public, it would only cause further dissension among the Comanche people. She feels that there is enough tension among the Comanches without adding accusations of witchcraft.

The Contemporary Situation

This chapter has dealt with Sanapia's treatment of a victim who has been witched by the magical insertion of the malevolent essence of an eagle plume. Sanapia doctors also among the Wind River Shoshone, southern Cheyenne, southern and northern Arapaho, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, Ponca, Creek, and Fort Sill Apache, as well as the Comanche; and thus she has confronted cases of witchcraft other than the variety which has been described in this chapter. Her general approach to a cure, however, is similar in all cases. She feels that the body of the victim has been put out of balance by some tangible or intangible entity; therefore, to correct the abnormal condition, she works to remove that which is causing this physiological disequilibrium.

Given the antagonistic feelings between the northern and southern Comanches and the fact that patterns of witchcraft exist, it would seem that there would be a high rate of intergroup witchcraft, at least being directed by the northerners. This does not appear to be the case, a major reason being that the southerners generally do not respond. They consider witches and witchcraft merely superstitious beliefs, or, at best, nonexistent in modern times. A further possible explanation of this lack of intergroup witchcraft is the special distribution of the Comanche bands—the more traditionally oriented bands cluster in the north and northwest of the Comanche area while the more fully acculturated band members are found in the south and southwest. There may be as many as 40 miles separating members of these two groups. Therefore, there is no necessity for daily social interaction between members of the opposing "tribes," which could reduce the generalized hostilities to more intense and socially unsettling personal conflict thus better facilitating the desire and the opportunity for the execution of witchcraft.

Witchcraft among contemporary Comanches is mainly intergenerational. Older men and women, feeling their life power fading, turn to malevolent magic in an attempt to augment their failing social prestige and to defend themselves against the more vital younger generation. The few cases of witchcraft which I was able to investigate among the Comanches followed this general pattern of essentially intergenerational jealousy and tension. This was also the basic

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rationale for witchcraft, especially between males, in the nomadic Comanche culture. In a society which emphasized physical prowess, the old and enfeebled were at a definite disadvantage. The older men could not join the younger in the prestigious activities of war, sexual adventuring, and hunting, and they were therefore forced to turn to magic and supernatural means if they desired to continue their futile attempts to compete for social power and prestige with the younger men of the tribe. Since Comanche culture was not oriented to allow an individual to acquire prestige and position through material acquisition alone, this avenue was also denied the older men.

Factors in the Decline of Witchcraft

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Perhaps a factor contributing to the lessening incidences of witchcraft, noted by Sanapia even in her own time, can be attributed to the fact that in the post-reservation period the older men of the tribe were able to acquire a certain economic power through such channels as land allotments and welfare, while at the same time the younger men were being denied their main traditional avenue to prestige—war. Thus a more tolerable balance developed between the prestige and social power levels of the young and the old. The woman, whose social position rose and fell with the male to whom she was attached, also acquired the benefits of this postreservation phenomenon. A woman could own land like a male, and with older women this became an attraction to the younger men, men perhaps born too late to take full advantage of the land allotments. Therefore, an older and economically more powerful woman could more successfully compete with a younger woman for available males.

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However, neither economic power nor supernatural methods can cause a woman to produce offspring after she has reached a certain advanced age. In a moment of anger or spite, a young Comanche woman's invectives directed toward an old woman will inevitably include a caustic reminder to the older woman of her "uselessness" as a woman. Sanapia and many of my female Comanche informants mentioned the potential dangers which a young woman exposes herself and her children to when she flaunts her offspring in front of an older woman whose children have left her. This, in Sanapia's opinion, is the reason for the high degree of witched infants and why Sanapia immediately accuses an old woman for the act of witchcraft.

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Several other factors can be suggested as relevant to the decline of Comanche witchcraft. With the allotment of lands the various family units within the same band became more isolated and thus any possibility of an act which could motivate an individual to operate witchcraft against another member of that band became lessened as relatively forced social proximity, as was the case in the reservation period, became lessened among band members.

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As the band's economic function was destroyed, the individual family units were compelled to become more independent. Thus, the older members of the Comanche extended families were necessarily allotted tasks as more jobs had to be handled by a smaller number of individuals. In this manner the older people

443 the Indian customers. Later he ran another check on the accuracy of
 177 our bookkeeping. He passed this information on to the Indians. I can
 797 well remember my embarrassment when one day, after he had finished
 his investigations, the Reverend Mr. Deyo shook my hand and thanked
 me for "dealing honestly with my people." It seemed just a little
 hard for him to understand that a white merchant would voluntarily
 deal honestly with the Indians. But I am sure Dad, Mother, and I
 443 would have been just as puzzled had anyone suggested we deal any
 177 other way. At least, I never heard the subject discussed.

114 I am positive that at the time I had never heard the word "roman-
 tic," but it represents the way I thought about the Comanches in our
 trade territory. They belonged to the group known as Quohadie Tejas,
 101 [62] or Antelope Eaters. Their range had been the high plains, centered
 in what is now the Texas Panhandle, and their leader was Quanah
 Parker. They had fought at Adobe Walls and in June, 1876, had been
 the last of the Comanches to surrender to the Army. By simple arith-
 114 metic, I knew that every male from the late forties upward had been
 a warrior. For my own convenience in thinking of them, I separated
 them into a group I called "the old fellows."

561 There was another group I didn't have to separate out, those rang-
 571 ing in age from their late teens to the late thirties or early forties. They
 [607] separated themselves out. Not only did they hold themselves aloof
 from the whites, but there was a separateness between them and the
 older Indians—apparently including their own parents.

564 I learned that these particular Indians had been East to a school
 371 financed by the government at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. I learned that
 657 most of them had the equivalent of a high school education, and some
 [873] had done college work. Now that they were home with the tribe, they
 made not the slightest move to use what they had learned, either to
 better their own condition or to be of assistance to the tribe.

561 They talked only Comanche among themselves, and wouldn't speak
 571 English when conversing with whites if they could make themselves
 141 understood by grunts, sign language, or pointing. I called these Indians
 609 the Carlisle group.

142 These young men and older boys, as well as the girls of the same
 age group, were better-looking Indians than the older, warrior-aged
 group and their squaws. It was most noticeable in their legs, which
 were straighter and better developed and appeared longer—the bandy
 look of the oldsters' legs had disappeared. These young Indians had

136 By the time the settlers moved in, the antelope had disappeared from the Comanche country, as well as the deer and turkey. As early as we arrived, I never saw a turkey. Some of the small black bear held out in the Wichita mountains for a few years. But there was no possible chance for the Indian to live on large game.

[224] Ducks, geese, plover, curlew, snipe, bobwhite, and prairie chickens were plentiful, and West Cache Creek was teeming with channel cat, blue and yellow cat, and perch; yet I never saw an Indian hunting birds or dangling a hook in the water.

[262] Fish-eating, I was to learn later, was almost taboo. Wallace and [261] Hoebel, doing research for their Comanche history, gained the impression that the Comanches ate fish only to keep from actually starving. [609] They had no objection to white people's fishing in their streams. I fished for miles up and down West Cache Creek, and no one ever objected.

000 I have often thought if I owned a farm West Cache ran through, I would charge people just to look at the creek. To the eye of a boy, there was nothing so beautiful as the blue-green water running over the slightly reddish-tinted granite sand. There was no quicksand on West Cache. Its sand was so sharp you scarcely sank in it when you walked, nor did you rile the water. Here and there were small beaches of clean sand where the swimmer could enter and leave the water. This cool, clear water came from the Wichita Mountains. Strong, vigorous elms along the high banks furnished shade for the swimmer or fisherman. More than sixty years later, I still feel it was the most beautiful prairie stream I have ever seen.

● 561 Too young in those days to realize the cause, I couldn't help but 571 sense the terrible separateness between my Carlisle group and the older men and women. Later I was to realize that government educators 657 of the late nineteenth century, in carrying out their theory of educating 871 young Indians, violated the unwritten bedrock commandment of human behavior: "Thou shalt not speak ill of any man in the presence 177 of his offspring." You must not cut away the support from beneath 155 his feet. You may be able to furnish him another platform, on which he may see fit to step; but he can never step onto your platform if you have first destroyed his footing.

[191] Even the Comanche children's language became taboo at Carlisle. After drilling into the children's minds what terrible people their par-